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UNCLAS RANGOON 000010

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY
USPACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: NEW BURMA PRISONER RELEASES: LOVING-KINDNESS AND
GOODWILL

REF: A. RANGOON 1647 AND PREVIOUS

[B](#). RANGOON 1612 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)1. (U) The GOB announced on January 2nd that it had released 5,588 additional prisoners from jails around the country. The release announcement was scheduled to precede the January 4th Independence Day holiday. Unlike the three prior mass releases (ref B) in this case the government did not claim to be freeing those unjustly imprisoned by former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's Military Intelligence (MI). Instead, the announcement cited the SPDC's "loving-kindness and good will" and desire to rehabilitate prisoners who have exhibited good behavior.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Details are still sketchy about exactly how many prisoners are actually free, and the number of political prisoners included in the 5,588. However, initial reports indicate that the following political prisoners (all listed in the December Amnesty International report) were among those freed on January 2nd or 3rd:

-- Aung Myint (aka Pyapon Ni Lone Oo), a well-known poet and journalist arrested in 2000 for issuing a statement protesting the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and sentenced to 21 years.

-- Kyaw Khin, an NLD MP-elect from Shan State arrested in 1996 for allegedly having tapes of anti-government messages and sentenced to 10 years.

-- Thein Dan, an NLD Divisional Executive Committee Member from Mandalay arrested in 1991 for writing an article criticizing the GOB's shooting of demonstrators and sentenced to 17 years.

-- Myint Soe (aka Johnny, aka Kyaw Oo), an NLD Youth member from Rangoon arrested in 1990 for discussing the formation of a parallel government and sentenced to 17 years.

The GOB also released Saw Tin Soe, a Karen National Union member from Karen State arrested in 1983 and sentenced to death (later changed to 25 years) for attempted hi-jacking.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The steady trickle of political prisoner releases over the last several months is a good thing. However, the numbers remain very small considering nearly 1,400 such prisoners remain behind bars. Furthermore, the releases pale a bit when examined in the context of ongoing arrests and harassment of NLD members (ref B) and the GOB's recent decision to further tighten the imprisonment conditions of NLD leaders Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo (ref A).
MARTINEZ